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## HOW TO THINK ABOUT SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE

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### INTRODUCTION

Throughout most of the past two decades, Western analysis of Soviet military doctrine was largely the esoteric preoccupation of a relatively small body of area specialists in Soviet strategic affairs. Since the emergence of SALT and the ambitious Soviet military buildup that first became apparent during the late 1960s, however, Soviet doctrine has increasingly become a topic of widespread discussion throughout the Western defense research community as a whole. Moreover, with the mounting popular disenchantment over détente and the rising concern over what many regard as a disturbing trend in Soviet weapons development and modernization, Soviet military philosophy--with its avowed emphasis on war-fighting--has additionally surfaced as a touchstone of growing attention and controversy among journalistic commentators and the public at large. With major new U.S. procurement programs at stake (most notably M-X and the cruise missile), sharpening disagreement over the nature of the East-West nuclear predicament and its implications for U.S. security planning, and the imminent prospect of a highly controversial SALT II agreement, the stage-setting may be under way for the most acute debate over U.S. defense requirements and Soviet strategic intentions that has occurred since the ABM controversy of 1969.

This resurgent concern among American defense analysts and opinion elites over what the Soviets are up to and what the United States should do about it is a healthy trend in U.S. strategic policymaking. For years, the U.S. defense community remained substantially oblivious

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of the content and nuances of Soviet military thought, relying primarily on Western strategic logic and what were widely held to be "objective" principles of nuclear strategy as the guiding criteria for U.S. strategic planning and force structure design. As long as the United States enjoyed a commanding lead in military technology and a position of clear numerical preeminence in the strategic balance, that was an approach which--however misguided or inappropriate--we could afford to employ with little operational consequence. Today, however, with the Soviet force posture roughly equivalent to our own in size and capability, it has become far more difficult to ignore the enunciated principles of Soviet doctrine with equanimity.

In an era in which the past asymmetries between U.S. and Soviet forces have largely been eradicated and "essential equivalence" has become a declared goal of both superpowers' defense policies and SALT strategies, the respective force employment concepts of the two sides have risen markedly in importance as factors affecting each country's overall strategic prowess. It is almost an axiom of military practice that in any confrontation between matched opponents, the side that commands the more astute array of strategic concepts is the side more likely to dominate in crises and war. The Soviets are keenly attentive to developments in U.S. strategic policy and are fond of intimating publicly that, in their view, the USSR possesses a superior military strategy. Whether or not that is the case, there is little denying that doctrinal adroitness and the operational effectiveness of war plans can make a great deal of difference in the outcome of confrontations between otherwise equal opponents. Soviet military doctrine, in marked contrast to prevailing U.S. strategic orthodoxy, is highly systematic in formulation, unambiguously martial in tone, and explicitly geared to a belief that should deterrence fail, some recognizable form of victory is theoretically attainable through the skillful exploitation of initiative, surprise, and shock. Coupled with the dramatic Soviet force expansion and modernization effort that has been steadily under way since the mid-1960s, this robust Soviet image of nuclear war and the seemingly confident belief in the military utility of strategic weaponry that informs and permeates it warrant



legitimate Western concern about Soviet intentions and serious attention to what the Soviets have to say about deterrence and war.

At the extremes, one finds two opposing views on the significance of Soviet doctrine prevalent in contemporary American strategic discourse. The first view holds that the essentials of official Soviet thought on deterrence and war are abundantly evident in a large body of translated Soviet military writings which are readily available to any observer willing to take the time to read them. Those of this persuasion argue that the Soviets say what they mean and mean what they say, that their declared views on the importance of being able to fight and win a nuclear war are inseparably linked to their ongoing strategic force improvement program, and that simple prudence requires U.S. decisionmakers to heed Soviet doctrine not only as a valid indicator of underlying Soviet strategic beliefs and expectations, but also as an important baseline from which U.S. strategic force planning should be conducted.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there is the school of thought which maintains that whatever Soviet military doctrine may superficially say, it should not be taken at face value because it emanates solely from professional military men and, as such, cannot reflect the real beliefs and views of those authoritative civilians on the Politburo who are ultimately responsible for Soviet strategic programs, policies, and behavior. Those espousing this viewpoint maintain that the Soviet weapons acquisition process is not driven primarily by *a priori* doctrinal imperatives, but by such institutional factors as program momentum, bureaucratic politics, technological determinism, and reactions to perceived external threats, factors which, by and large, shape the defense policies of all modern industrial powers, the United States not excluded. Moreover, they assert, the principles of doctrine represent, at best, merely a reflection of desiderata that Soviet military leaders regard as optimum warfare and a wish-list for parochial use in budgetary infighting rather than any codification of actual Soviet military expectations or rigid body of rules the Soviet leadership would feel compelled to follow in a real contest of wills with the United States. As exemplified both by the ABM Treaty and the traditional

pattern of Soviet circumspection in past crises, this school argues, Soviet political leaders, at bottom, accept mutual deterrence as the only solution to the East-West nuclear dilemma, notwithstanding the militancy and bombast of Soviet doctrinal writings.

It is not the purpose of this essay to adjudicate these counter-vailing arguments or to take sides in the debate, although as it will become clear presently, the tone of the following discussion will tend to treat the former view somewhat more sympathetically than the latter. Nor is it to reconstruct in detail the specific axioms and principles of Soviet military doctrine, which have been dealt with at great length already in the academic literature and are by now generally familiar to most attentive students of strategic affairs. Rather, its objective is to highlight the key themes and propositions of Soviet doctrine and to offer some perspectives on how--and with what reservations--they should be used as a basis for understanding broader Soviet strategic programs and behavior. Protagonists on both sides of the debate may well bridle at the dichotomy of views etched out above and maintain that it unfairly reduces their highly nuanced arguments into easily demolishable straw men. While there is doubtless ample room for such criticism, the device nonetheless has its uses in defining the boundaries of contention on the issue. In fact, it is the thesis of this essay that both points of view contain important elements of truth and that reality consists of a complex amalgam of the two. It is a further argument of this essay that there is much we do not know--and cannot know--about Soviet objectives and motivations, either from formal doctrine or from other observables such as Soviet forces and deployment rates, and that all analyses of Soviet intentions based on these incomplete and frequently ephemeral indicators should be advanced with a seemingly measure of diffidence and caution. The essential argument here is that while Soviet military doctrine tells us far less than we need to know about the motive forces behind Soviet behavior (and can be dangerously misleading if read out of context as a "master plan" of Soviet strategic goals), it nonetheless reveals a great deal about the general mind-set of the Soviet leadership regarding the pre-conditions of deterrence, the technical requirements for maintaining

it, and the military responsibilities that would be energized in the event of its catastrophic failure.

#### KEY THEMES IN SOVIET DOCTRINE

In the formal taxonomy of Soviet military thought, military doctrine is typically defined as "the sum total of scientifically-based views accepted by the country and by its armed forces on the nature of contemporary wars which might be unleashed by the imperialists against the Soviet Union, on the goals and missions of the armed forces in such a war, on the methods of waging it, and also on the demands, which flow from such views, for the preparation of the country and the armed forces for war." This conception of doctrine constitutes the central component of a complex system of military thought which is stimulated by the inputs of military science (the lessons derived from reflection on past wars and the opportunities provided by modern weapons technology) and, in turn, provides inspiration and guidance for the development of military art (the actual strategy and tactics of wartime force application). Were one to delve deeply into the scholastic disquisitions of Soviet writers on the specific content and purposes of these interconnected categories of thought and attempt to uncover the precise interaction and feedback relationships among them, one would quickly become snared in a philosophical byzantium and lose sight of the more practical question of what it is that constitutes the mainstream of Soviet thinking on war and peace. For the purposes of this discussion, it is sufficient to note that official Soviet views on deterrence and war are highly formulaic and systematized, aimed at providing broad criteria for peacetime weapons acquisition and wartime force employment. These views are continuously worked out and refined by theoreticians in the senior service academies, the Main Political Administration of the armed forces, and the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff, and are integrated into finished doctrine at the Ministry of Defense level for review and formal approval by the Party leadership.

Reduced to its essentials, Soviet doctrine accords closely with the Clausewitzian dictum that war is simply a violent extension of



politics and must be constantly conducted with sensitivity to the political objectives at stake. Soviet military writers fully appreciate that modern weapons technology, with its vast destructive potential, has dramatically altered the traditional *character* of war and has elevated deterrence to a level of unprecedented importance in the Soviet hierarchy of national objectives. They steadfastly deny, however, that nuclear weapons have in any way altered the *essence* of war as a political event or the long-standing responsibility of the Party leadership to take every practicable measure for assuring the survival of the Soviet state should it occur. From the vast body of published Soviet writings on military doctrine, one can extract the following propositions as constituting perhaps the most fundamental tenets of declared Soviet strategic thought.

*The best deterrent is an effective war-fighting capability.* During the past fifteen years, American defense policy has increasingly come to rest on the belief that nuclear war is both irrational and unwinnable in any meaningful sense, and to adopt as its principal standard the maintenance of a survivable "assured destruction" capability so as to guarantee that any Soviet nuclear attack against the United States would cost a prompt retaliation that would visit unacceptable damage on Soviet society. In effect, this policy has placed abiding faith in the durability of deterrence and in the assumption that the Soviet leadership would always remain circumspect under duress. In doing so, it has concentrated (indeed counted) on the preservation of deterrence and has tended to pay less heed, by comparison, to the concepts, capabilities, and strategies that might be required to cope successfully in the event of a deterrence failure. It has also led to the adoption of a fairly explicit set of "sufficiency" criteria stipulating that an arsenal which projects an image of "equivalence" with Soviet forces and guarantees the capacity to inflict a specified level of retaliatory damage following the worst imaginable Soviet attack is adequate for underwriting U.S. national security.

There is nothing in known Soviet military thought that even approximates this American pattern of logic. Soviet strategic pronouncements typically maintain that the only acceptable deterrent is one



that rests on the intrinsic capabilities of Soviet forces rather than on the rationality and good will of the enemy. In practical terms, this reduces to a doctrinal requirement for an inventory of forces and battle management infrastructure that could rapidly generate to a level of high readiness in a crisis, carry out the necessary actions dictated by the circumstances of the crisis, and retain control of the situation throughout the period of hostilities, blunting the enemy's military initiatives and exerting every possible effort to assure the Soviet Union's emergence from the crisis in a position of net advantage.

The principal difference between this strategic orientation and that of the United States is that American deterrence theory places primary stress on the required measures for preventing war in the first place, whereas Soviet thinking concentrates largely on the requirements for responding effectively and surviving in the event deterrence fails. This fixation of Soviet doctrine can be seen reflected across a wide range of observable features in the current Soviet strategic posture. It is also apparent in the absence of any discernible criteria of strategic "sufficiency" in Soviet force structure development. Soviet military planning adheres to no known yardsticks of strategic adequacy in any way comparable to the American "assured destruction" concept. Instead, it allows for an open-ended process of arms accumulation constrained only by domestic economic and technological resources, U.S. forbearance, and the formal protocols of negotiated arms limitation agreements. It would probably not be overly facetious to suggest that for Soviet military planners, the favored measure of strategic sufficiency is the notion that "too much is not enough." This is not to say, of course, that the Soviet leaders have inexorably committed themselves to the achievement of strategic superiority over the United States whatever the cost. They well understand the obstacles that would confront any such policy commitment and doubtless appreciate that by precipitously galvanizing American fears and provoking an American reaction in kind, they could well find themselves ultimately worse off in the strategic balance than they might have been otherwise.

On the other hand, the Soviet leadership has given every indication--both at SALT and elsewhere--that it is determined to test the United States at every step to see what the traffic will bear and to acquire the most expansive and diversified inventory of weapons that U.S. tolerance and Soviet resources will permit. Whether or not this behavior pattern is directly driven by Soviet military doctrine, it certainly accords with the basic injunctions of that doctrine, which hold that nuclear war--however gruesome to contemplate--is not impossible, that its occurrence would place great demands on Soviet capabilities, and that the best way to prevent it is to exert every practicable effort to prepare for it.

*Victory is possible.* Naturally associated with this doctrinal emphasis on the need for a credible war-waging posture is the conviction that some meaningful form of victory, even in high-intensity nuclear war, is theoretically attainable if the proper military actions are executed in a timely fashion. To be sure, two important qualifications must be immediately attached to this statement. First, the fact that Soviet doctrine stipulates a requirement for the capability to wage nuclear war and insists that it would be irresponsible not to assume that Soviet victory is theoretically achievable does not mean that the Soviet military leadership *ipso facto* prefers war to peace or places any less emphasis than their American counterparts on the overriding importance of deterrence. It does attest, however, to a Soviet recognition that deterrence can fail despite the best efforts of both sides to prevent it, and that in such a circumstance, the Soviet armed forces have an obligation to do more than simply absorb the initial attacks of the enemy passively and then retaliate indiscriminately with their surviving forces in a consummation of their deterrent threat for no political ends other than to inflict a punitive reprisal for the enemy's transgression. Instead, they have a perceived duty to make the best they can out of an inherently bad situation by recognizing the situation for what it is, seizing the initiative, and doing everything possible to prevent an already dismal state of affairs from devolving into something even worse. Second, the Soviet doctrinal belief in the possibility of victory is in no way an expression of

sublime confidence in the minds of Soviet military planners that victory would be an automatic and natural consequence of their compliance with the dictates of Soviet nuclear strategy in an emergency. It merely indicates that the Soviet High Command--and presumably the Party leadership--regards victory as an objective to be consciously striven for with every reasonable effort, ranging from determined investment in adequate strategic forces and other war survival measures during peacetime to bold and assertive strategic operations should deterrence come under imminent and unambiguous risk.

The Soviet civil defense program provides a fitting illustration of this perspective. There has been much heated debate in the United States recently over the extent of Soviet efforts in this area and the degree to which they have provided the Soviets with a real capability for protecting their population in wartime. A strong case can be made, however, that the most significant aspect of the Soviet civil defense program is not its precise capacity to minimize Soviet population fatalities in a nuclear war (which even the Soviet leaders themselves can not know with confidence) but what it indicates about the general Soviet attitude toward nuclear war.

One frequently finds declarations in Soviet military commentary such as this statement made several years ago by the late Minister of Defense, Marshal Grechko, that in the event of a new world war, "we are firmly convinced that victory in this war would go to us." Such remarks are far more reflective of exhortation than serious strategic analysis, and it is a considerable overstatement to suggest categorically that "the Soviet Union thinks it could fight and win a nuclear war." In all probability, Soviet military men are not fundamentally different from most other professional soldiers the world over: knowing more intimately than anyone else what the real rigors and agonies of combat are like, they are the last to seek a fight, the least convinced things will go easily, and the most acutely sensitive to the fact that one can never be sufficiently prepared.

On the other hand, one also occasionally encounters remarks in the Soviet literature to the effect that "any *a priori* rejection of the possibility of victory is harmful because it leads to moral



disarmament, to a disbelief in victory, and to fatalism and passivity. It is necessary to wage a struggle against such views." Statements of this genre are another matter altogether and deserve the most serious consideration of Western military planners. While they bespeak no confident expectation that Soviet victory in war is foreordained, they strongly suggest that the Soviets are fully committed to confronting the specter of nuclear war with their eyes wide open.

*It pays to strike first.* Surprise, initiative, mass, shock, and, momentum have been among the most recurrent themes in Soviet military writings during the past decade and a half. Occasionally one can even find direct assertions in those writings that "preemption in launching a nuclear strike is the decisive condition for the attainment of superiority over [the enemy] and the seizure and retention of the initiative." The sources of this Soviet fixation on the need for being able to "frustrate" and "break up" an enemy attack are not easy to pin down, although doubtless the experience of the Nazi invasion in 1941 and the traditional Bolshevik emphasis on the importance of nipping undesirable trains of events in the bud before they get out of hand are prominent among them. In all events, Soviet military doctrine is heavily laced with endorsement of preemption as a preferred strategy at the edge of war, on the premise that whatever uncertainties there might be at the moment of decision, inaction would probably carry greater risks than proceeding with an attack if the survival of the Soviet state were in jeopardy.

This Soviet conception of the utility of preemption is in no way comparable to the Western notion of a "splendid first strike" aimed at so thoroughly degrading an enemy's capacity to wage nuclear war that he would be physically deprived of any remaining options to inflict significant retaliatory harm. It is highly unlikely that the Soviet military leadership harbors any delusions that it either currently possesses such a capability or stands within grasp of it anywhere within the foreseeable future. The standard distinctions in Western strategic discourse between "first strikes" and "second strikes" (as well as between "tactical" and "strategic" nuclear operations) are entirely alien to the idiom of Soviet military philosophy. The Soviet



belief in the merits of going first rests less on any assumption that doing so will substantially disarm the opponent than on a conviction that tremendous psychological and military advantages can be gained by getting the initial jump on the adversary and forcing him constantly thereafter to operate in a reactive mode.

This intellectual orientation of Soviet doctrine may partially explain the evident Soviet determination to acquire a credible hard-target kill capability against U.S. silo-based ICBMs, even though the U.S. alert bomber force and deployed SSBN fleet would remain survivable. One can readily imagine a favored crisis scenario in the minds of Soviet planners in which a portion of the Soviet ICBM force is launched in a preemptive counterforce attack against the U.S. ICBM inventory, home-ported SSBN fleet, and command and control infrastructure. Following such an attack, the United States would find itself in a state of utter societal disorganization and chaos, left with a sharply diminished retaliatory arsenal and a highly degraded or non-existent battle management capability, and facing a Soviet adversary who not only remained militarily untouched but also stood poised with a large residual nuclear force and a fully alerted air defense capability. In such a situation, Soviet planners might believe, the rational response for the U.S. leadership would be to retain its surviving forces as instruments for negotiating a settlement from a position of weakness rather than to execute a SIOP-scale retaliation against Soviet cities, which would only trigger a devastating Soviet counter-response in kind. Even if the United States were to opt for some sort of sub-SIOP nuclear reprisal rather than merely throwing in the towel forthwith, the Soviet Union would--by the logic of this thinking--still retain the upper hand in the engagement. Whatever losses it might sustain, it would nonetheless remain in the favored position of pursuing objectives it had established in advance in a conflict whose rules were overwhelmingly of Soviet making.

There is no evidence in Soviet doctrinal writings that Soviet military leaders believe they could preempt against the United States with impunity, and the rationale behind their emphasis on preemption is certainly not to pursue the key to a quick and easy victory (or the

illusion that such a victory might even be possible). Rather, it seems to reflect a conviction that the least miserable option at the brink of a hopelessly unavoidable nuclear catastrophe would be to strike first and decisively so as to secure a measure of initiative and control, without which even a Pyrrhic victory would remain beyond reach.

*Restraint is foolhardy.* Part and parcel of the Soviet doctrinal emphasis on timely preemption is a thoroughgoing rejection of Western crisis-management concepts such as demonstration strikes, escalation control, limited nuclear operations, and other signalling ploys for intrawar bargaining and communication of resolve. Soviet writings typically dismiss such concepts with open scorn as clever but naive and misguided American notions that fail to appreciate the harsh realities of modern warfare. Partly this attitude reflects a deep-seated Soviet military skepticism about the likelihood that large-scale nuclear force application can be subjected to finely-tuned control under the stresses and confusion of battle. Primarily, however, it reflects an abiding doctrinal axiom that any half-measures once the threshold of armed conflict has been crossed would risk sacrificing the initiative and compromising the prospects for a decisive and prompt victory. As one Soviet military writer has put it, "any delay in the destruction of [the enemy's] means of nuclear attack will permit the enemy to launch nuclear strikes first and may lead to heavy losses and even to the defeat of the offensive." Implicit in this doctrinal orientation is the notion that deterrence is solely a passive peacetime function of deployed forces in being, and that once deterrence fails, the task of strategy is not to continue the process of diplomatic dialogue through the measured use of violence, but to employ nuclear force with whatever intensity necessary to defeat the enemy militarily in the shortest possible time.

*Numbers matter.* As noted earlier, Soviet doctrine does not categorically insist that absolute superiority over the enemy is a precondition of acceptable strategic preparedness, nor does it maintain that there is some magic level of deployed forces whose achievement will assure strategic sufficiency. Hardware is only one ingredient in the composition of Soviet strategic power. An equally important ingredient

in Soviet eyes is strategy, and an effective strategy adroitly pursued can significantly compensate for material shortcomings in the Soviet military arsenal. At the same time, Soviet doctrine seems to indicate--and the pattern of Soviet arms acquisition over the past decade seems to confirm--a Soviet belief that strategic adequacy requires the deployment of as much weaponry in all categories as Soviet fiscal and technological assets and such external constraints as arms control agreements and the tolerance of the United States will allow. Although some Soviet declaratory statements since the beginnings of SALT have professed a willingness to settle for some roughly-defined strategic "equivalence" to the United States (seemingly ruling out any determination to seek manifest superiority), these statements have been occasioned primarily by the political requirement for Soviet compliance with the spirit of détente and do not reflect an underlying belief that once having achieved such "equivalence," the Soviets can complacently rest on their laurels. The concept of "parity" is purely a Western legal construct artificially transposed to the realm of strategic affairs and has no discernible counterpart in known Soviet military thought. In practice, the Soviet insistence on "equivalence" has tended to mean that the Soviets will not countenance accepting anything less than that and will seek to acquire as much beyond it--through self-serving negotiatory tactics at SALT and careful probing of U.S. resolve--as they can reasonably get away with.

This belief in the value of abundant forces is apparent across the entire spectrum of Soviet military activity. For theater war contingencies, the Soviets have produced over 40,000 tanks, a truly dramatic achievement that exceeds that of the United States many times over. Their army is twice the size of ours. Their navy is also substantially larger. They are currently producing fighter aircraft at more than double the rate of the United States. At the strategic level, there is similar evidence of this doctrinal penchant for quantity in the large inventory of heavy Soviet silo-based ICBMs (numerically constrained only by SALT), the Soviet refusal to incorporate land-mobile ICBM limits into the SALT I Interim Agreement, the incipient proliferation of SS-20 MRBMs with their attendant ambiguity regarding rapid



convertability to long-range SS-16s, and the Soviet indisposition to accept the reduced ICBM numerical ceiling embodied in the original Carter SALT proposal of March 1977. These activities may or may not represent visible signs of an underlying Soviet effort to achieve significant strategic advantage "on the cheap" within the framework of SALT and détente, but they certainly attest to a closely-held Soviet military conviction that when it comes to strategic preparedness, there is safety in numbers and one can never have more than enough.

The sources of this Soviet belief in the value of an amply endowed military posture run far back into Soviet history and doubtless include traditional Soviet self-perceptions of inferiority, as well as the bitter memories of the costs of inferiority left by the near-disastrous Nazi onslaught of 1941. More recently, they have almost surely been added to by the embarrassing debacle the Soviets suffered in the Cuban missile episode of 1962. There has been much debate among Western analysts over whether or not it was the incontrovertible U.S. strategic superiority that principally enabled the United States to emerge from that crisis so successfully. Whether or not the United States in fact exploited its superior nuclear posture with as much clever finesse as some observers claimed it did shortly after the event, there is every reason to believe that the Soviets, for their part, learned a lasting lesson about what it means to be on the *inferior* side in a nuclear showdown. In considerable part because of the Cuban crisis, Khrushchev lost his job and became supplanted by a new regime with quite different strategic values, a massive program of Soviet force expansion and modernization was set into motion which has continued unabated to this day, and the Soviet leadership, by every indication, bound itself to an all but enshrined commitment never again to allow itself to slip into a state of such perceived weakness that it could be so easily humiliated by its principal adversary.

To say that Soviet military doctrine places an important premium on numerical abundance of forces (indeed, on as large a margin of military advantages as may be feasible) is not to argue that Soviet military planners harbor any belief that strategic superiority can either supply "instant courage" in crises or that it necessarily constitutes a tool



that can be employed in specific and preplanned ways to exact concessions from the adversary in coercive diplomacy and war. There is nothing in the Soviet military literature even remotely comparable to the kinds of sophisticated--if frequently unpersuasive--arguments one characteristically finds employed by proponents of strategic superiority in the West. The Soviet case for strategic advantage is more diffuse and tends to regard numerical force preponderance principally as a comfort-inducing investment against possible future contingencies whose precise character cannot be anticipated. In peacetime, such preponderance affords Soviet political leaders the freedom to act in crises with a favorable edge of self-assurance by shifting the burden of anxiety onto the opponent. In wartime, it would presumably provide Soviet commanders a cushion of reserve forces against the uncertainties of combat and thus help underwrite a more audacious strategy than might otherwise be possible.

#### SOVIET DOCTRINE IN PERSPECTIVE

So much for the essentials of Soviet military doctrine as they appear on the books. It remains now to consider what they mean in practical terms as determinants of Soviet force structuring and as guides to Soviet behavior in future crises that could erupt into war.

To begin with, it bears repeating a familiar refrain among students of Soviet military affairs that doctrine serves many purposes besides simply prescribing criteria for weapons development and use. It provides, for example, a systematic body of official "truths" for reinforcing Soviet military morale and reaffirming the conviction of Soviet soldiers that they retain an important purpose even in an age of deterrence, in which the principal rationale of strategic weapons is to prevent wars rather than fight them. The repeated stress in Soviet writings that nuclear weaponry has not invalidated the possibility of achieving meaningful victory is perhaps the most eminent example of a doctrinal tenet that exists in considerable (though by no means exclusive) measure for this purpose.

Doctrine also provides a convenient set of bureaucratic rationales for the armed forces to employ in advancing and defending their

institutional interests in the competitive arena of Soviet budgetary politics. The ambiguity in Soviet doctrine regarding whether a future world war would be short or protracted, for example, offers a ready justification for large strategic reserve forces, and the doctrinal insistence that no such war could be won without combined-arms operations serves, among other things, to help assure that all of the armed services receive a respectable piece of the action in the allocation of military roles and resources.

Finally, doctrine plays an important part in the Soviet strategic dialogue with the United States and aims in part to manipulate the perceptions and expectations of the U.S. strategic leadership by casting Soviet military strength and prowess in the best possible light. The emphatic Soviet disavowal of such U.S. strategic concepts as limited nuclear targeting and intrawar deterrence, and the equally adamant Soviet insistence that any war would be intense and uncompromising from the outset, for example, have the partial aim of forewarning the United States that the Soviet Union will not abide by U.S. rules in the event of war and neatly typify how doctrinal principles collaterally serve Soviet propaganda ends.

With these allowances accounted for, however, there remains much in Soviet military doctrine of operational significance for Soviet defense planners. Where the imprint of doctrine has been most vividly apparent has been in the physical complexion of Soviet strategic force developments during the past decade. It goes without saying, of course, that Soviet military doctrine is primarily the product of military men, whereas the ultimate responsibility for Soviet resource allocation and force structuring inheres in the civilian Party apparatus. It is also clear that the civilian leadership is under no compulsion to rubber-stamp the institutional preferences of the armed forces. Nonetheless, the entire range of Soviet military activity since the mid-1960s has accorded surprisingly--and disturbingly--with the central themes of Soviet military doctrine highlighted in the preceding discussion.

This is not meant to imply that the Soviet force posture since Khrushchev's ouster has been a product of unrestrained doctrinal determinism or that doctrine has, in any sense, blindly "driven" Soviet

military procurement choices. There are, for example, observable inconsistencies between certain edicts of Soviet military doctrine and the realities of contemporary Soviet military preparedness, perhaps most notably apparent in the relatively low readiness of Soviet strategic forces for prompt combat employment. Soviet doctrinal writings harp constantly about the critical importance of maintaining the Soviet military machine peaked for launch on a moment's notice. Yet in contrast to the United States, which continuously maintains approximately half of its SSBN boats on operational patrol, the Soviet Navy deploys only a handful of its ballistic missile submarines on station at any given time and leaves the rest concentrated in their highly vulnerable home ports. Similarly, unlike the U.S. Strategic Air Command, which constantly maintains a third of its bomber force on five-minute strip alert, Soviet Long-Range Aviation is not known to observe any comparable practice. One could fairly argue, perhaps, that these are not significant anomalies since Soviet doctrine posits preempting at some point during a gradually intensifying political crisis, in which the Soviet military would presumably have more than ample opportunity to generate its forces to full alert status. The fact remains, however, that they explicitly belie a recurrent refrain in Soviet declaratory commentary.

Furthermore, Soviet military doctrine, with few exceptions (most notably on the question of whether a conventional war in Europe would "inevitably" escalate to the nuclear level), has remained more or less internally consistent and conceptually stable since around 1960, well before the post-Khrushchev weapons buildup began to lend real teeth to Soviet military pronouncements. The sharp discontinuity between the extravagant war-fighting rhetoric of Soviet military writings and the miniscule capability of actual Soviet strategic forces during the early 1960s clearly accentuates the fact that it has always been hard-nosed internal politics, leadership preferences, and institutional interest adjudication rather than automatic obeisance to the doctrinal catechism of the Soviet military that determine the character of Soviet strategic programs and policies.



On the other hand, it goes without saying that if there is a convergence of leadership predispositions with doctrine, then the latter becomes critically important as an explanatory factor. Although the evidence is far more presumptive than empirical, there is good reason to surmise that something much like this occurred shortly after the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime assumed power. The latter part of the Khrushchev era, one may recall, was a period of considerably turbulent Party-military relations, fed by Khrushchev's refusal to satisfy the demands of his marshals and exacerbated by the abortive Cuban missile venture, whose outcome most of the military and many in the Party felt was precisely a consequence of Khrushchev's inadequate defense preparations. With the advent of the new leadership in 1964, a fundamental change seems to have occurred. This is not the place for a detailed reconstruction of that period, but it is a reasonable inference from known events that following an intense Party-military debate in 1966 and 1967 over the nature of the Soviet security problem and the requirements for dealing with it, a mutual accommodation was struck between the Party and the military, in which the military was granted most of its strategic program requests that Khrushchev had left unrequited in return for a renewed spirit of institutional cooperativeness in the defense policy process. Moreover, Khrushchev's political successors appear to have become increasingly persuaded by much of the logic of Soviet military doctrine and assimilated it into their own belief system (if they were not indeed already substantially persuaded even while Khrushchev remained in power).

Tacit proof of this hypothesis may be inferred from a number of subsequent developments. For one thing, there has been a remarkable degree of quiescence, if not outright amity, in Soviet Party-military relations since 1967 which seems to entail far more than mere surface calm. Senior Soviet military figures have been heard to intimate openly to Westerners that "things have been a lot easier" since Khrushchev's departure and the patching up of Party-military conflicts over institutional roles and resource allocations that ensued in its wake. Second, there has increasingly appeared to be a blurring of the former institutional separation of Party and military in Soviet



defense decisionmaking since the late 1960s. The current Minister of Defense, Dmitri Ustinov, is a civilian with long-standing ties to the Soviet defense industrial community, and his appointment to that position broke a long tradition of assigning it to professional military men. The chairman of the important Military-Industrial Commission, L.V. Smirnov, is also a civilian. Ustinov is additionally a voting member of the Politburo, as was his immediate predecessor, Marshal Grechko, prior to his death in 1973. Brezhnev, for his part, has become a self-appointed Marshal of the Soviet Union. And all of these figures interact closely and regularly on defense policy matters in a number of high-level joint political-military planning committees with an apparent degree of harmonious collegiality that would have been almost unthinkable during Khrushchev's incumbency.

Finally, there is the inescapable fact that recent developments in Soviet weapons acquisition and military construction bear unmistakable earmarks of being significantly informed by the criteria of Soviet military doctrine. To list only the most obvious of these, there is the vigorous Soviet pursuit of a credible hard-target kill capability through the proliferation of increasingly accurate MIRVed ICBMs. There is evidence of growing Soviet interest in preserving a capability for wartime force reconstitution both at the theater and strategic levels. There have been repeated demonstrations of Soviet interest in acquiring the requisite antisatellite capabilities to deny the United States the wartime use of its space-based command, control, communications, and surveillance capabilities upon which its own strategic force effectiveness critically depends. Notwithstanding the ABM Treaty of 1972, there continues to be a highly robust Soviet research and development effort in advanced antiballistic missile technology and no evidence whatever that the Soviet military has relinquished its traditional emphasis on the importance of strategic defense in modern warfare. The Soviet air defense network, for which we have no comparable counterpart either present or planned, is widely known to be the most extensive in the world and continues to grow in effectiveness and sophistication. Finally, there is the whole spectrum of war-survival measures which the Soviets have been implementing in recent years,

ranging from their hardened grain-storage facilities and their controversial population-defense program to their less noted but far more significant steps to acquire a hardened and redundant command and control capability and to maintain central direction and control throughout any military emergency. None of these activities would be necessitated by a deterrent policy based on "assured destruction" assumptions, yet each constitutes an indispensable component of any strategy seriously aimed at preparing for the possible eventuality of a major nuclear conflict.

Certainly this complex of programs requires more in the way of explanation than simply the reductionist assertion that it was hatched from Soviet military doctrine. It exists partly because of normal program momentum, partly because it is economically and technologically feasible, partly because Russians simply do things that way, and partly for a whole gamut of additional institutional, political, and cultural reasons. At the same time, there is little about it that is palpably incompatible with Soviet doctrine, and enough about it that accords with the war-preparation and war-survival injunctions of that doctrine to strike any reasonable observer as being far too consistent to be coincidental. Soviet strategic doctrine is manifestly a combat-oriented operational philosophy that treats the possibility of nuclear war as a threat that cannot be simply wished away, and that orientation is precisely the dominant hallmark of the comprehensive Soviet military build-up that has been under way, SALT and détente notwithstanding, throughout the past decade. If for no other reason than this extraordinarily close correlation between theory and reality, it seems appropriate to conclude that at least as far as peacetime force development and deployment are concerned, Soviet military doctrine is very much a vital factor bearing on the shaping of Soviet strategic policy.

As for the extent to which Soviet doctrine provides reliable insights into the way the Soviets would comport themselves at the actual brink of a nuclear war, there is obviously far less that can be said with any confidence. For one thing, however explicit Soviet doctrinal writing may be in its depiction of the Soviet security problem, it is hopelessly elusive regarding what specific operational measures might

be taken to cope with it were deterrence to fail. From everything available to us in the published Soviet military literature, we still lack any clear sense of what actual Soviet nuclear war plans involve, and we could possibly be gravely misled if we tried to infer them solely from the known doctrinal indicators. To use a crude analogy, enunciated Soviet military doctrine is somewhat comparable to the U.S. Joint Strategic Objectives Plan (JSOP), a highly formal and widely coordinated national document which posits broad definitions of the strategic situation, general peacetime and wartime goals of U.S. military forces, and rough criteria for achieving those goals that most members of the U.S. political-military community can comfortably live with. Soviet doctrine is not in any sense, however, a source of specific "how to" guidance for the Soviet political leadership or for commanders in the field, and it tells us nothing whatever about the sorts of detailed target lists, laydown strategies, and preplanned rates of fire that doubtless figure in the Soviet counterpart to our SIOP.

Second and more important, Soviet doctrine may provide a valuable intellectual ordering device for Soviet political and military planners, but it certainly is not in any way binding on the Soviet leadership. Blessed as they are with both natural conservatism and a total lack of prior experience at nuclear war, the Soviet leaders would doubtless feel powerful compulsions toward caution, circumspection, and restraint in any crisis that appeared in serious danger of escalating to the nuclear level. At such a moment of truth, they might well conclude that what appeared reasonable enough when it was being briefed in calmer times by the General Staff had suddenly become the consummate height of strategic insanity. Moreover, the Soviet force posture is now in the process of acquiring a rich breadth of potential that will soon permit far more sophisticated options than anything currently addressed in the Soviet doctrinal literature. Whatever that literature may say about the importance of massive preemption at the outset, the riskiness of incremental force application, and so on, the Soviet leadership still retains the intellectual and organizational capacity for improvisation under stress. It is altogether plausible that they would feel no compunctions about throwing the whole book of doctrinal



edicts out the window in a crisis if they felt they had a better way to address the problem. What such a better way might look like is, of course, impossible to guess at in advance. The Soviet leaders themselves are probably as unsure as anyone else. The best that can be said now is that Soviet military doctrine tells us something, though far from all, about the way the Soviet leadership thinks about strategic problems and provides some general hints about the sort of intellectual mind-set they would probably take with them into a major nuclear crisis. Like all doctrines, however, it is merely a conceptual road-map, not a rigidly binding route plan, and offers little of predictive value about future Soviet leadership behavior other than to indicate that up to now, Soviet leaders have tended to concentrate more attention than their American counterparts toward what to do should deterrence break down. Because of that, they would probably arrive at the threshold of any actual nuclear calamity at least having given somewhat more systematic thought to the choices and dilemmas they faced.

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